



Knowledge, understanding, and adherence to Social Media regulations by youth in the United Arab Emirates

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Introduction

Given the heavy use of the digital space for the past two decades, rational practices of social media have become a primary issue for researchers. Several studies have examined youth interaction and practices. This study aims to explore attitudes and perceptions towards rational and legal online practices by students affiliated with UAE universities, to measure their knowledge, understanding, and commitment to it while using social media.

Although computer expenditure can be beneficial to individuals, recurrent access and use somehow increase the opportunities for unethical use of computer-related devices (Shah 2014). The widespread use of different social networking sites exacerbated ethical violations and cybercrime globally. The quality and accuracy of the information circulated in these networking sites vary greatly from site to site and from one page to another, making it difficult to distinguish between facts and opinions (Eagleton et al. 2012). Web 3.0 increased social interaction and cyber activities; the phenomenon of self-publishing or blogging was also created (Li 2015, 439).

Consequently, several studies have developed frameworks for categorizing and measuring information quality (Lee et al. 2002). The Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) Code of Ethics also listed several regulations around the use of social media (PRSA 2015). At the local and national levels, many countries, including the United Arab Emirates, have framed the uses of the Internet and criminalized violators of their laws, regulations, and decrees to ensure the safe use of the Internet. Accordingly, the concept of online ethics began to spread widely.

Online Ethics

The term online ethics, also called cyber ethics, Internet ethics, or computer ethics, means the acceptable use of online resources in the virtual space. Derived from the

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Greek word 'ethos', which means 'custom', 'habit', and 'way of living', the term refers to individuals' commitment to ethical principles and human values when using a computer. Mabawonku (2010) noted that the term 'Ethics' is concerned with the behavior or conduct of individuals or groups in society. Ethics have also been seen as an act of displaying values that are universally accepted such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, respect, and concern for others. Other values include keeping promises, trust, integrity, and courage (CPCU Community 2016).

Many researchers have contributed to the definition of online ethics as being simply the aspect of using a computer, linking it to the advances in the information and communications technology sector (Mason and Ismail, 2008). Masrom and Ismail (2008) defined the term of online ethics as a field concerned with the ethical use of the Internet. It is important to note that while Manner considered that the rise of computers had caused new ethical problems, Kling (1999) thought that computers brought a new dimension to old problems. The concept of computer ethics evolved with Moore (2017), as his main concern was the essence of the social and ethical activities in the virtual space not its technical aspects. In the same context, Lokhorst (1999) stated that the concept of computer ethics is linked to identifying and analyzing the effect of virtual space on the social and human values of health, wealth, work, opportunity, freedom, democracy, knowledge, privacy, security, self-fulfillment, and the like.

Hissom (2006) also famously delivered the ten commandments of computer ethics, amongst which the most famous are: "Thou shalt not steal mouse balls; thou shalt not use computers to harm other people; thou shalt not interfere with other people's computer work; thou shalt not use a computer to steal." Radwan (2017) further indicated that online media laws and regulations are affected by social values and norms as cyberspace has been facilitating the perpetuation of many illegal activities such as spam, privacy, hacking, and attacks on computers through viruses, amongst others. Users also face the risk of computer addiction, plagiarism, personal identity theft, financial theft, and exposure to pornography.

Online Ethics and regulations in the UAE

The UAE aims to become a leading global hub and an open lab for the Fourth Industrial Revolution's applications. One of the foundations to reaching this goal is applying digital-first and digital by default policies which will lead to better quality, efficiency, trust, transparency, innovation, engagement, safety, digital capacity, growth, and value for all (UAE National Digital Guidelines).

Four (4) laws regulate all types of media and tools of expression in the UAE including new digital media. They control the traditional and new media organizations' content (UAE Public Service Charter for Media):

- Federal Law No.15 for 1980 Concerning Press and Publications: Regulates printing and publishing licensing and activities in the UAE and it applies to traditional media content.



- Federal Law No.11 of 2016, National Media Council (NMC): A federal government body entrusted to oversee and undertake the media affairs in the United Arab Emirates. The scope of NMC includes traditional media and digital media platforms.
- Federal Law No. 5 of 2012 on Combatting Cybercrimes and its amendment by the Federal Law No. 12 of 2016: According to this law, whoever commits crimes related to the illegal use of information by new technologies will be punished by imprisonment and /or a financial fine.
- Federal Decree-Law No. 2 of 2015 on Combating Discrimination and Hatred: It aims to protect everyone in the UAE and bring the concept of social security, tolerance, co-existence, and acceptance to a new level.

In addition to that, there are many guidelines for using online platforms such as:

- Guidelines to Website owners: This guideline assists owners in ensuring that the website does not violate any laws and regulations in the UAE (National digital guidelines & National Media Council Legislations and regulations 2019)
- Guidelines for social media users in the UAE: Set on October, 23rd 2019, by the Ruler of Dubai inviting Emiratis to adhere to about 10 guidelines while using social media. The list encourages Emiratis to reflect on the UAE's accomplishments and humanitarian initiatives and values.

Literature review

The issue of awareness and online ethical practices has aroused great interest amongst researchers around the world. To provide rich theoretical content on this topic, the authors first decided to present several studies dealing with social media in general, from its emergence to the present day, in order to measure the development of research and the diversity in the viewpoints of the studies conducted. Next, special emphasis will be placed on studies devoted to virtual ethics and related aspects.

Social media (SM) is a set of Internet-based applications founded on ideological and technological foundations that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). According to Christopher and Christian (2018), the many functions available on social media applications will continue to affect people's lives and their relationships. Indeed, SM has changed the communication process; it has allowed people to share personal experiences, comment on current events, meet people, and interact with them without any restrictions. Several studies have addressed the role of social media in the dissemination of information (Gerlich, Browning, and Westermann 2010). Gerhardt, Eisenlauer, and Frobenius (2014) mentioned that social media has changed the communication habits of individuals in the virtual public space where users are talking to unrestricted audiences, not only discussing public issues but also revealing private information. Lee et al. (2018) focused on the relationship between



social media users and organizations, which they described as overly complex; they noted that trust is the basis of all online communication. Luc, Stamp, and Antonoff (2018) stressed in their study, the public's high prospects for integrity, empathy, and goodwill on these networks. Roland et al. (2018) have examined the interactivity on social networks while Warner et al. (2018) explored the academic exchange through them.

In addition to its impact on the way users communicate, several scholars have addressed the uses of social media in many areas such as business, politics, and education. They were seen as transparent channels that reduce corruption and aid in crisis management (Alexander 2013; Lee, 2018; Bertot 2012) and as engines for political change (Chan et al. 2018). Ranganwala and Towbin (2018) explained that social media could function as an operational monitoring strategy for forecasting risks, falling costs, and mitigating widespread diseases in times of crisis. SM is perceived as an efficient tool for teaching and learning sciences. Saad and Alexander (2018) discussed the adoption of social media in the education process and mentioned its advantages and limitations to science users. Young et al. (2018) demonstrated that social media was a valuable way for professional physicians to enhance communication with and guide surgeons, thus refining the interaction between doctors and patients as well as mentors and trainees. Xu et al. (2020) also highlighted the positive impacts of social media on civil engineers' ethical behavior. Snoussi et al. (2019) addressed the use of social media in the academic sphere, mainly in communication studies. The study highlighted the benefits of the introduction of social networks in formal learning operations and the evolution of pedagogical approaches regarding the teaching process in higher education.

Parallel to the aforementioned aspects that focused on studying social media as an instrument that promotes communication and redefines its features, many studies evaluated the legal and ethical aspects of its usage. Several studies have addressed the matter of the perception and awareness of cyberspace users, mainly students, about laws and ethics regulating the usage process. Williamson et al. (2001) tried to offer insights into the Internet ethics of college students, a major category of Internet users, by using the MES to explore students' perspectives on questionable cyber practices involving 'Privacy, Accuracy, Property, and Accessibility' (PAPA) issues. Results revealed that students are willing to engage in questionable practices, to hold a 'buyer-beware' view of web-based activities, and to believe most others using the Internet feel similarly.

Masrom, Ismail, and Hussein (2008) examined awareness of computer ethics among undergraduate students at two universities in Malaysia. The results demonstrated a general awareness of internet ethics among participants who claimed they did not know the laws regarding the use of proprietary software systems. Iyadat et al. (2012) examined university students and the ethics of computer usage at Hashemite University, Jordan. Students' awareness was of an intermediate level. Rommel (2016) also explored awareness of online ethics by



technology students at Leyte Normal University in the Philippines. The results showed that respondents were aware of most indicators of computer ethics. Cyberbullying only recorded a moderate level of awareness; as for other computer ethics indicators such as cybersquatting, domain capture, and espionage, the participants claimed that they were less aware of them.

Abdel-Rahim, Osama, and Adel Ahmed (2015) discussed a topic related to students' awareness in their pilot study. The authors concluded that participants who partook in the training session regarding the "effectiveness of university students training programs in Egypt" showed more awareness of digital ethics. The study highlighted that this type of program contributed considerably to raising awareness among universities' students. Olawale (2017) examined the awareness and perceptions of Computer Ethics by undergraduates of a Nigerian University. Findings showed a high level of awareness, the most prominent factor impeding compliance with online ethics was the country's poor economic situation. The study by Tella and Oyeyemi (2017) presented results on the perception of copyright infringement by undergraduates. Findings indicated that 86.2% of the respondents agreed that a copyright infringement could be considered an intellectual deception. In addition to that, 48.9% specified that it is very important to file a declaration for any copyrighted material used for academic purposes. Based on the aforementioned results, most undergraduates had a positive perception of the need to uphold ethical principles in their use of copyrighted material.

Cilliers (2017) explored ethical issues that include software piracy among college students at a university in South Africa. The results showed that 59.3% considered it wrong to copy software for educational purposes, and 91.2% felt it wrong to share music or movies downloaded from the Internet with friends. In Saudi Arabia, Al-Hazani noted the importance of promoting awareness of intellectual and information security among university students to address any unconventional social ideas in a study entitled "Social networks and their impact on enhancing the intellectual security of Princess Noura University students" (Al-Hazani 2018). The researcher noted the low level of perception and awareness in the sample concerning the security standards when using social networks.

Tammy Swenson-Lepper and April Kerby (2019) examined users' perceptions of ethical issues related to communication on social media. Results showed that most students have observed violations of ethical norms. They believe that the most common ethical issues are inappropriate pictures, privacy concerns, and people harassing others. Kathleen Bartzen Culver and Byunggu Lee (2019) addressed the intersections of ideology, perceived ethical performance of news media, trust in news media, and news participatory behaviors in their research on 'Perceived Ethical Performance of News Media: Regaining Public Trust and Encouraging News Participation.' The authors concluded that liberals are more likely than conservatives to perceive that news media operate ethically. Implications of regaining media trust and encouraging participatory practices were also discussed.



In the Arab world, Abdel-Hay (2020) emphasized that university students tend to use authenticated platforms to obtain information and news about the pandemic, such as news websites, radio, and interactive television sites, rather than individual accounts and platforms with unknown sources. Social media is seen as a tool that allows young people in the UAE to showcase their various innovations in many important areas that benefit Emirati society (Al-Shaer 2018). Al-Abdouli (2019) emphasized that there is a correlation between the intensity of Emirati youth's exposure to social media and their positions on national security issues, as well as between the motives behind Emirati youth's use of social media and their positions on national security issues.

Abdul Kafi (2019) studied the impact of cultural considerations specific to Emirati society on the nature of photos posted on youth accounts on social media. Al-Zabout (2015), in her study on the awareness of Jordanian youth about social media ethics, referred to an overall positive evaluation of the ethical practices of a sample of Jordanians. Abdel Maqsooud (2019) asserts that media students in Egypt are aware of the importance of social media regulations to protect users and society from misuse, especially when it comes to breaches of privacy and deception. Al-Sayed (2019) further links media culture with the user's ability to discover fake news and misinformation in a study applied to a sample in Egypt.

To sum up, the aforementioned studies dealt with general uses of social media in diverse fields as well as users' awareness levels of ethical issues related to computer regulations; some of them listed several cases of abuse that users experienced. This study will address the same problem of youth awareness of regulations related to the use of the digital space, mainly social media, in the Emirati context; a special focus will be put on the correlation between universities students' understanding of UAE regulations and their online practices, to test their commitment to the online legislation they claim they are aware of.

Statement of the problem

The research raises two main questions: The first relates to the extent to which university youth in the UAE know and understand the legal and ethical rules for using social media, while the second relates to their level of commitment, which means the degree to which their understanding of the correct use of SM is reflected on their true everyday digital practices.

Hypothesis

The study starts from three hypotheses, namely:

- I. Young people in the United Arab Emirates use social media on a large and regular scale, which enables them to gain a good knowledge of the regulations and legislation related to the use of digital platforms, especially those related to rational practices such as privacy, security, reliability, and non-deception.



- II. Knowledge and understanding of UAE legislation and regulations related to social media will be reflected in the sample's behavior (commitment level) given that their educational level is high (they are university students) which will push them to respect the standards.
- III. Based on the individual characteristics of the users, there are statistically significant differences between the sample segments (gender, nationality, and college type) in their knowledge, understanding, and commitment to the UAE regulations for the use of social media.

Objectives:

This study is guided by these objectives:

- To explore youth perceptions of online ethical practices.
- To detect youth awareness of online positive usage, in line with United Arab Emirates guidelines.
- To measure youth adherence to cultural, societal values and legal regulations while using social media.

Theoretical framework

This study is guided by the deontological theory of ethics defined by the critical philosopher Emmanuel Kant. The theory states that people should adhere to their obligations and duties when engaged in any activities they have or choose to do. According to this statement, a person will follow their obligations to another individual or society because upholding one's duty is what is considered ethically correct. The authors believe that the mentioned theory is appropriate for the topic addressed in this research where they are trying to determine the level of commitment of social media users towards the UAE online regulations that they (the users) admit to knowing and understanding.

Determining university students' commitment to issues related to digital ethics is very important because the aim behind the issuance of many UAE laws related to cyberspace is to spread a culture of rational use of social networking sites, and to avoid problems arising from digital misuse. According to the aforementioned theory, if individuals knew and understood that they had an obligation to others regarding compliance with internet ethics, it would be difficult for them to participate in the privacy infringement, defamation, felony, cyber fraud, and other online violations that were born with the widespread use of social media. Consequently, this will automatically lead to adherence to the social media usage theory of ethics.

Hence, in the practical part, the authors chose to examine first the sample's particularities of social media use, then the awareness (understanding) level, and finally the commitment rate (adherence).



Method and sample

An online quantitative survey instrument was conducted on a simple random sample of 300 undergraduate students enrolled in two (2) universities in the UAE, the University of Sharjah (UOS) and Ajman University (AJ), during the period from 20 February to 10 March 2020. The questionnaire was designed and distributed via Google Forms; the link was sent to participants via email, Blackboard, and Microsoft Teams. The sample was extracted from colleges of humanities and applied sciences. The data was gathered and analyzed via SPSS.

- To measure the sample's knowledge of legislation and positive practice standards through digital platforms, a question was assigned about six Emirati legislations through a five-point scale, from "I know very well" to "I do not know".
- To measure the sample's understanding of rational practices through digital platforms and social media, five-point scale questions were constructed around issues such as privacy, security, reliability, etc. Including the alternatives from "always" to "never". The scale contains 20 sentences.
- To measure sample's adherence via their practices across digital platforms, a five-point scale was built that includes the alternatives from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale included 10 phrases

The previous studies were relied upon in developing metrics phrases. The questionnaire was evaluated by three specialists in teaching ethics of communication, communication, and digital media.

The sample seems to be balanced in terms of quantitative and qualitative characteristics: 41% of respondents are males and 59% are females; 47% of them are registered in applied sciences programs while 53% are registered in humanities. The sample was equally composed of citizens and international students.

Table 1. Sample

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	123	41.0
	Female	177	59.0
College	Sciences	141	47.0
	Humanities	159	53.0
Nationality	UAE Citizens	150	50.0
	Residents	150	50.0
n.=		300	100

Findings

1- Social media usage and particularities of use:

To determine the social media usage characteristics of the sample, the survey included questions inquiring about the number of hours respondents spend per day on SM as well as the platforms most used. Results are included in figure 1,2, and 3.

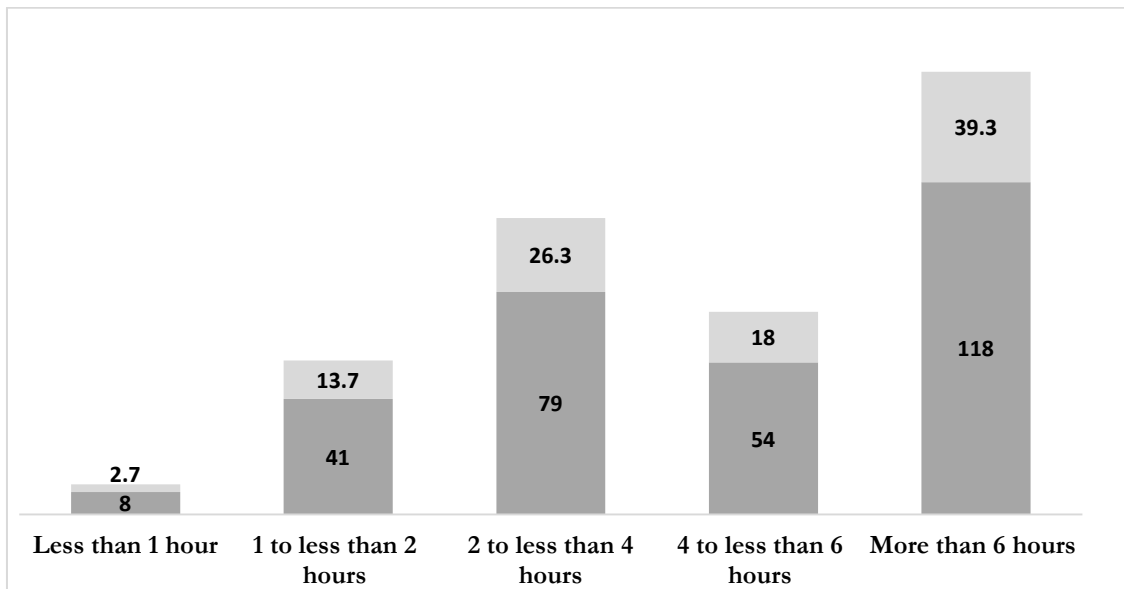


Figure 1. Time spent daily on social media

Data indicate intensive use of social media among young people; regarding the frequency of use (Fig.1), it should be highlighted that 39.3% of respondents use SM more than six (6) hours per day, while only 26.3 stay connected via social networks from 2 to less than 4 hours.

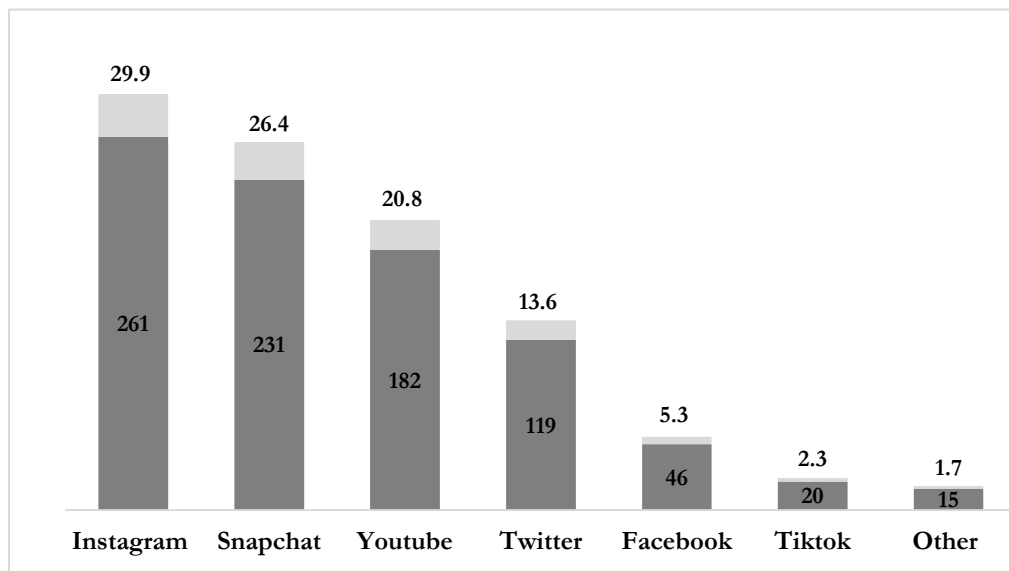


Figure 2. Social Media usage

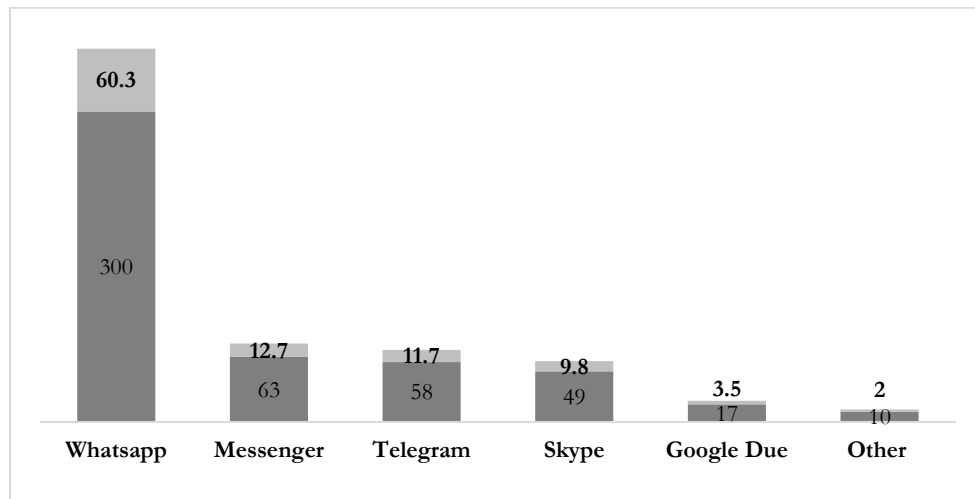


Figure 3. Communication Application Usage

According to (Figures 2 and 3) the findings of the peculiarities of social media use by participants are as follows: Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube are the most commonly used networks for posting and commenting (Figure 2), while WhatsApp is specifically chosen as the first tool for private communication before Messenger and Telegram (Figure 3); Facebook came in a late position (Figure 2), which means respondents were not more tempted by other social networks.

Notably, Facebook came in a late order among the sample, in contrast to what was indicated by the global media insight statistics, as it comes second after YouTube in terms of intensity of use in the country. The researchers attribute this difference to the nature of the sample: while the research sample was restricted to college students, the Global Media study audience was general.

2- Knowledge and understanding of social media legislation:

In Tables 2 and 3, the authors wanted to measure the respondents' knowledge and understanding of the Emirati laws, legislation, and guidelines related to digital platforms, as well as their adherence to them through their online activities.

Table 2. Knowledge, Awareness, and Uses Measurements

knowledge, Awareness and Uses Measurements	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
A-Knowledge of media laws and regulations in UAE:				
1. Federal Law No. 15 for 1980 Concerning Press and Publications	1	5	2.30	1.181
2. Federal Law No.11 of 2016, National Media Council	1	5	1.98	.952
3. Federal Decree-Law No. 2 of 2015 on Combating Discrimination and Hatred Prohibited Federal	1	5	2.47	1.211
4. Federal Law No. 5 of 2012 on Combatting Cybercrimes and its amendment by the Federal Law No. 12 of 2016	1	5	2.75	1.313
5. UAE Prohibited Content Categories	1	5	3.13	1.255
6. Guidelines for social media users in the UAE	1	5	3.35	1.301
B-Understanding of ethical practices:				
1. I post my personal information publicly.	1	5	2.24	1.058



knowledge, Awareness and Uses Measurements	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
2. I am curious about the personal life of my followers.	1	5	2.62	1.061
3. I post my photos showing people around me without their permission.	1	5	1.46	.798
4. I use the mode "Public" in my timeline publications.	1	5	2.74	1.447
5. I'm familiar with the privacy policies of social media.	1	5	4.00	1.312
6. I authorize users to tag me and post materials in my timeline (texts, photos, videos...etc).	1	5	2.99	1.333
7. I download Apps. Even when they ask for permission to access contacts, location information, photos, etc.	1	5	2.68	1.142
8. I accept to add friends without reviewing his / her profile.	1	5	2.13	1.162
9. I chat with my online friends and share my personal information without knowing them in the reality.	1	5	1.70	.965
10. I open links without checking their source.	1	5	1.72	.947
11. I depend on private/ individual accounts to get the news.	1	5	2.48	1.335
12. I share information or news without checking their validity or source.	1	5	1.62	.979
13. I purchase products from unknown social media commercial accounts.	1	5	1.38	.676
14. I express my opinion publicly on social media.	1	5	2.45	1.131
15. I respond to polls sent to me from any source on social media.	1	5	2.35	1.105
16. I can differentiate between real news and rumors.	1	5	3.79	.967
17. I sometimes interact with others with a fake identity.	1	5	1.58	.980
18. I edit photos before uploading them as original ones.	1	5	1.97	1.218
19. I follow government warnings about denying rumors.	1	5	3.78	1.179
20. I respond to all collects and donations' suggestions.	1	5	2.18	1.080
C- Commitment towards regulations' standards				
1. I strongly oppose ideas against my beliefs.	1	5	2.70	1.115
2. I only accept friends from the same citizenship and society.	1	5	3.78	1.148
3. My posts reflect my attitudes, culture, identity, and country.	1	5	2.39	1.108
4. My activities on social media are compatible with UAE values and norms.	1	5	2.03	.998
5. I share posts (photos, videos, texts...etc.) about my country or UAE achievements.	1	5	2.33	1.110
6. I interact positively with others in social media chats.	1	5	2.08	.904
7. Before posting or sharing comments, photos or videos, I check whether they break the law or not.	1	5	1.81	.954
8. I accept different opinions, religious and cultural ideas published on social media.	1	5	2.01	1.005
9. I judge other cultures and countries through their citizens' posts and comments.	1	5	2.90	1.216
10. I block friends who have different opinions.	1	5	3.73	1.141

Negative items and scores have been reversed.

Concerning the **knowledge** of the regulations related to the ethical use of social media, the data shows that the most well-known ethical norms of participants are related to the Guidelines for social media use in the UAE (mean = 3.35), the UAE



Prohibited Content Categories (mean = 3.13), the Federal Law No. 5 of 2012 on Combatting Cybercrimes (mean=2.75), and the Federal Decree-Law on Combating Discrimination and Hatred (mean=2.47).

Table No. 2 (addressing the level of understanding) included the following indicators: the data shows a great understanding of the social media privacy policies (Sentences 1 to 5 Part B), (mean = 4.00) as well as the criteria for safe practices (Sentences 6 to 10 Part B). The authors conclude that the participants have demonstrated great understanding of standards for proper use, mainly in terms of chatting, sharing personal information with unknown followers, opening links without verifying their source, and adding friends without viewing their profile.

On validating friend accounts (Sentences 11 to 15 Part B), the results showed a decrease in the arithmetic mean of many practices, reflecting a lack of understanding of security aspects, including purchasing products from unknown commercial accounts on social media, share information or news without verifying its authenticity or source, expressing opinions publicly on social media, responding to polls sent from an anonymous source, and relying on private/individual accounts for news.

Regarding the criteria for accuracy and non-deception (Sentences 16 to 12 Part B), the data shows a high mean of the standards, which indicates the ability of respondents to distinguish between true news and rumors and adhere to official warnings about rumors or false news in the country.

The decrease in some negative behaviors, such as connecting with a fake identity, reflects a high level of understanding and compliance with some standards for the proper use of social media in the UAE.

3- Commitment towards social media regulations' standards:

The results of Part C (Table 2), relating to commitment to ethical standards, reveal common practices such as friendship requests are only accepted from users of the same nationality or region (means = 3.78), and friends with different opinions are usually banned (means = 3.73). While each of the following practices are rated average: Opposing ideas strongly against the beliefs of the participants, judging other cultures and countries through the contributions and comments of their citizens, and disseminating what reflects the respondents' attitudes, culture, and identity.

Furthermore, the results revealed the respondents' preference for publishing and reading content in line with their opinions and interests, as well as forming friendships and following up with those who share their interests and opinions.

4- Significant differences in terms of awareness and commitment between age, nationality, and type of academic specialization

To trace the differences between the sample segments (gender, nationality, and



college type) in their knowledge, understanding, and commitment regarding the Emirati regulations for using social media, statistically significant differences were measured between the participants in terms of gender, nationality, and type of academic specialization. Table 3 illustrates the results as follows:

Table 3. *t*-test

Sample	Variable	Type	N	Mean	Std. D.	Sig. (2-tailed)	t	df
Sex	Time	Male	123	2.99	1.352	.000	-6.978	298
		Female	177	3.92	.941			
	Knowledge	Male	123	15.3415	4.89367	.015	-2.438	298
		Female	177	16.7458	4.91725			
	Awareness	Male	123	47.30	10.800	.411	-.824	298
		Female	177	48.34	10.709			
	Using	Male	123	26.23	4.431	.850	.190	298
		Female	177	26.11	5.797			
Nationality	Time	UAE Citizen	150	3.87	1.032	.000	4.992	298
		Residents	150	3.20	1.290			
	Knowledge	UAE Citizen	150	17.0400	4.87409	.002	3.089	298
		Residents	150	15.3000	4.88354			
	Awareness	UAE Citizen	150	47.36	10.938	.377	-.885	298
		Residents	150	48.46	10.551			
	Using	UAE Citizen	150	25.00	5.800	.000	-3.887	298
		Residents	150	27.32	4.419			
College	Time	Sciences	141	3.05	1.191	.000	-7.058	298
		Humanities	159	3.97	1.064			
	Knowledge	Sciences	141	15.0709	4.65625	.000	-3.699	298
		Humanities	159	17.1447	5.00865			
	Awareness	Sciences	141	46.52	11.716	.033	-2.137	298
		Humanities	159	49.17	9.650			
	Using	Sciences	141	27.16	4.730	.002	3.135	298
		Humanities	159	25.27	5.584			

Differences in terms of time spent using social media

According to the *t*-test, there are statistically significant differences between male and female participants regarding the period dedicated to using social media for the benefit of female students, where the mean score is 3.92, while males reached 2.99. Other differences are also detected in the time a user spends on social media according to nationality: The concentration of usage tends to be for citizen students (average = 3.87) compared to international students (means = 3.20). The last kind of alterations is observed between respondents according to their academic specialty: The intensity of use tends to favor the humanities and social sciences (average 3.97).

Differences in terms of commitment on social media legal standards

Statistically significant differences are also detected regarding the practices complying with the ethical standards, between students registered in humanities



and social sciences disciplines (means =25.25) and those who were registered in applied sciences (means =27.16), and for the benefit of the residents (means = 27.32) over UAE citizens (means=25).

Differences regarding knowledge of laws and legislation related to the use of digital space

The knowledge of social media regulations appeared to be for the benefit of the UAE citizens (mean=17) over residents (means = 15), as well as for the benefit of humanities and social sciences (mean= 17.14) over applied sciences (means= 15.07).

No statistically significant differences were detected in the other variables although the authors noted that the arithmetic averages of knowledge of social media legislation were higher than the average, especially those related to the UAE regulations and guidelines. The arithmetic averages for understanding the criteria for rational use of social media were high, indicating a high level of awareness.

Discussions and conclusion

Findings highlighted an intense use of social media in terms of daily frequency, but a moderate level of awareness. The respondents demonstrated a particular understanding of the guidelines on social media usage standards proposed by the UAE national authorities, particularly those primarily related to security precautions. The obtained intensity of use in the research is in line with the Global media insight statistics for 2020 which indicate that the average hours of using the Internet in the UAE are 7.03 hours per day and the average hours of using social media are 2.57 hours per day. The specific understanding regarding the laws and regulations of the United Arab Emirates related to the use of social media seems to be a result of the State's efforts to disseminate the information and advertise it through various media channels, rationalizing its use and protecting users from misuse.

Thus, the authors tend to support the first hypothesis with some caution: Young people in the United Arab Emirates use social media on a large and regular scale but their knowledge of laws and regulations remains moderate.

Moreover, a lack of commitment to Internet ethics has been observed through some stated practices regarding differences in terms of opinions and cultures; this conflicts with online ethics standards that call for mutual respect and cherish cultural diversity. This leads the authors to conservatively accept the second hypothesis, which states that the knowledge and understanding of UAE legislation and regulations related to social media will be reflected in the sample's behavior (commitment level), given the fact that their educational level as university students will push them to respect the standards; here also, the level of commitment is moderate.



In fact, the authors believe that the mentioned practices, which suggest a kind of mental blocking, are perhaps resulting from fear of the unknown other or simply, due to the early stages of online uses. They trust that such negative behaviors are going to disappear gradually because results revealed that the more time devoted to exposure on social media, the greater the level of understanding of the participants.

Furthermore, statistically significant differences were revealed with respect to the period allocated for social media use and ethical practices (gender and specialties), as well as other differences related to knowledge of social media systems, in favor of UAE citizens over residents. And for the benefit of students of humanities and social sciences over the applied sciences. This is consistent with the third hypothesis stipulating that based on the individual characteristics of the users, there are statistically significant differences between the sample segments (gender, nationality, and college type) in their knowledge, understanding, and commitment to the UAE regulations for the use of social media.

It has to be highlighted that the observed moderate understanding led the respondents to overall acceptable practices across social media, which reflects a certain adherence and commitment as authors detected a strong relationship between understanding the standards for the correct use of digital platforms and the behavior of actual users. These results are consistent with Kant's "deontological theory of ethics" because the interviewed youth demonstrated through their digital practices their commitment to the ethical standards that they came to know and understand when using social media. According to the theory, if social media users knew that they had a set of UAE online regulations to comply with, and understood the guidelines of safe practices, then it would be problematic for them not to adhere to them, or to participate in digital crimes such as breaching privacy, defamation, felony, and online fraud. Thus, it would spontaneously lead to adherence to social media ethics. This conclusion is also supported by young people's interest in learning about the rules governing the privacy of other users, as well as by the low rate of non-privacy practices, such as posting detailed information or photographing others without their permission.

Temporarily, the authors conclude that it is too early to talk about young people's total and unconditional adherence to ethical standards and regulations. Similar findings are verified by researchers in international contexts. The mentioned findings appear to be close to the results of Al-Hazani (2018) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which indicated that there was a low level of awareness among the sample regarding security standards when using social networks. Similarly, the results of Ramlan and Nik (2017) in Malaysia revealed that most Malaysian university students have a moderate perception of various acts violating academic integrity that have involved digital plagiarism.

Finally, the authors remain concerned about the moderate level of understanding of digital regulations, especially with the world's increasing reliance on cyberspace.



They recommend that the concerned national authorities focus their campaigns on issues related to internet crimes, ethical violations, seclusion, and hate speech in order to raise awareness among young users and increase compliance with the regulations for proper use.

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